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Frogtown and Currytown

WITHIN THE WESTERN LIMITS OF SAVANNAH ARE Frogtown and Currytown, through which flows Musgrove Creek, narrow and sluggish, on its way from "Big Ogeechee" to the red Savannah River. These are two poor communities, as can be seen from the paintless little houses on dirt streets that often lack sidewalks. With the canal cutting the center of the district, there is scant space for gardens; but in spite of this, there are small patches of earth green with collards and turnips, and almost every "stoop" is decorated with a row of plants in tins of assorted dimensions.

During week days, with many persons away at work in other sections of the city, it is mostly the old who are found at home. Grandmothers and grandfathers "mind" the small children while the mothers work out.

One old woman, Anna Miller,* had lived most of her youth on a Butler Island plantation, where some of the older workers had occupied the same cabins given to them before emancipation.

"Sebral uh dem hans wuz bery ole people," said Anna Miller. "Dey speak a funny language an none uh duh res ub us couldn hahdly unuhstan a wud dey say. Dey hab special name fuh all kine uh ting, but duh only ting I kin membuh is dat dey call a watuh bucket a 'juba haltuh'."

We found here, too, that in certain households certain foods are considered to bring bad luck.

"I dohn eat peanuts," Millie McKen ** told us, "an I dohn let a soul in muh fambly eat em."

* *Anna Miller, 1018 Cuyler Street, Currytown.*
** *Millie McKen, 409 West Duffy Street, Currytown.*

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"Can you tell us why?" we queried, but she only shook her head.

"All I know is dat dey's bad luck. I foun dat out, an I wohn leh one come in muh house."

Handicraft objects in this section were more numerous than in many of the other communities. We found a most unusual brush * made from the palmetto.[45a] It was about four inches in length and two inches wide; both bristles and back had been made from a single piece of the rough fiber of the palmetto bark, spliced into splinters on one surface to form the bristles.

The work of two wood carvers was brought to our attention. One of the carvers ** made a specialty of small wooden figures (Plate Ia, Ib). He showed us several full length human figures, two or three busts mounted on square blocks of wood, and two oddly shaped objects, each with mask-like features carved on one surface.[41i] When we remarked on the originality of his work and its symmetry of design, he said simply, "I jis picked it up wen I wuzn wukin."

The other carver † had made several nondescript figures, but we were chiefly interested in two linked wooden chains (Plate Ia). One of these, which had an attached box with a ball enclosed, was similar to a chain previously shown us by another man in the community. Each man had cut his chain with all its details from a single block of wood.[70f, h]

In Frogtown and Currytown there is intense interest shown in witches, spirits, and conjure. Personal experiences were related to us by several old residents, who had come in contact with supernatural elements.

Old Henry Gamble ‡ told us that he has been accustomed to "seein tings" since childhood. Particularly on rainy nights ghosts appear to him. He said, "Sometimes dey float

* *Made by and property of Professor Redmond, Park Avenue and West Broad Street, Currytown.*
** *Jerome Carter, 445 Jefferson Street, Frogtown.*
† *Preston Coleman, 532 Charles Street, Frogtown.*
‡ *Henry Gamble, 619 West Broad Street, Currytown.*

A, [See Category 322, plate following p. xxxii-A--Analyst]

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"Ise quainted wid two ole men, one call Uncle Friday, duh othuh Uncle July," was the statement of a third Brownville resident.* "One wuz bawn on Good Friday an duh othuh on duh Foth uh July." [20]

We learned that certain foods are viewed with suspicion and are never eaten or allowed to be brought into the house.[65] The exact reason why these foods are forbidden was not explained to us. One woman said, "One ting I do lak is peanuts, but I dohn eat um. An I dohn let nobody else eat um in muh house. I dohn know jis wy, but it bring bad luck all duh week." **

The palmetto tree, Robert McNichols † told us, supplies an edible substance in the form of palmetto cabbage taken from the center of the tree, about a foot below the top. This is the terminal bud of the tree, white in color, tender, and resembling the ordinary northern cabbage. It may be eaten cooked or uncooked.[45a]

From the same tree a wine is made. We learned two different recipes for the preparation of this beverage. The wine is sometimes made from the cabbage, which when first cut contains a white sap. The chopped cabbage is put in a container where it is allowed to ferment, after which it is strained and sugar added.‡[45b] The wine may also be made from the dark blue palmetto berries. These are placed in a container until fermentation occurs after which the juice is extracted and sweetened. The wine is a clear dark brown and is said to have an excellent flavor. Incidentally, the palmetto tree serves a variety of other purposes. Palmetto fibre is used in making baskets, rugs, bottle holders, and numerous other objects.[45]

Many of the Brownville residents are skilled in palmetto weaving and also in woodcarving. Walking sticks (Plate

* *William Mikell, 616 West 32nd Street.*
** *Beatrice Ward, 832 West 35th Street.*
† *Robert McNichols, Brownville.*
‡ *Ibid.*

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115 304 from her description seemed to have been a small scar, oval in shape and slightly raised.

We had been told by her neighbors that she, too, bore a mark, although none of them had seen it.

"Did he mark you too, Rosanna?"

262 She gave us a piercing look, ignored the question, and continued along another vein. "He eat funny kine uh food. Roas wile locus an mushruhm an tanyan root. It lak elephant-eah an tase like Irish potatuh. He plant mosly benne an rice. I plant a lill benne ebry yeah too. He use tuh beat benne seed in mawtuh an pestle, sometime wid a lill shuguh an sometime wid a lill salt an make a pase. He eat it on bread aw he eat it jis so."

252 534 We broached the subject of drums.

"Yes'm, dey use tuh dance tuh drums an dey beat um fuh fewnuls too.

115 "I wuz too lill tuh membuh anyting wut wuz said bout muh granpa, but muh pa wuk on duh fahm fuh is 'boss.' He make lot uh duh tings dey use. I ain got nuttn wut he had but dis." She brought forth a curious looking tool resembling a can opener with a hook in the end, which, she said, her father had used for extracting teeth. He had also been familiar with various roots and weeds, which he used in the preparation of medicines administered to the sick on the plantation.[48b]

413 759

115 304 We returned to the subject of the mark, at the mention of which her eyes suddenly narrowed.

"Wut yuh doin? Is yuh gonuh sen me back tuh Liberia?"

When we assured her that we had no such intention she became complacent and even voluble.

"Yes'm, he mahk me," she admitted, "on muh ches."

"What did he do it with? What sort of an instrument did he use?" we asked, vainly trying to conceal our interest.

"I dohn membuh. I wuz too lill."

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skinned, proud, upstanding and loyal, suspicious of strangers but generous and trusting to friends (Plate VIII, IX, X). Most of the very old inhabitants have died in the past decade, so that to have reached the age of sixty places a man or woman in the patriarchal class. The grown people between twenty-five and thirty, are still close to the traditions and beliefs in which they have been reared. Firmly believing in the Bible, they still are aware of other beliefs and customs handed down by their parents and grandparents.

A pleasant, intelligent woman * of about forty-five chatted with us. "Cose, det is duh will ub God, but dey do say jis duh same wen a pusson die, 'Maybe somebody fix em' [15] aw 'I sho know dat uhmun wuz rooted.' I ain nebuh bought no powduh muhsef but jis day befo yestuhdy a uhmun frum Tatemville wuz right yuh tuh dis house sellin High John duh Conqueruh fuh fifty cent an she sho say it would bring yuh powuhful good luck, but I ain hab fifty cent.[8]

"Cose, it ain good tuh fool much wid dem tings, but yuh sho hab tuh be keahful not tuh let no enemy git hole uh yuh haiah combins cuz dey say dey sho could fix yuh den." [10] She laughed a little uneasily. "Ef yuh dream ub a snake dassa enemy neahby too, but ef yuh weah a snake skin roun yuh wais, it good fuh wut ail yuh.[504.] * An ef uh enemy come tuh yuh house an yuh dohn wahn im deah no mo, yuh jis take duh bruhm an sweep out quick attuh im. Den sprinkle a lill salt on duh flo weah his foot track bin an sweep em all out duh doe an he sho wohn come back no mo."

At this point in her narrative a swarm of barefoot children, black and with shining eyes, clustered around us. One and all were eating crabs, biting into the soft part of the body shell or cracking a claw with strong white teeth. Word had evidently just gone out that some excitement was brewing. Strangers had come and were talking to "Miz Minnie." If anything was going on they didn't want to miss it.

* *Minnie Dawson, Pin Point.*

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SANDFLY

791 In a section of Sandfly known as Baker's Crossing lives Ophelia Baker, better known as Madam Truth, professed fortune teller and clairvoyant. The woman's sober attire and her modern attractive house give little evidence of her profession. When holding a seance, however, her whole appearance undergoes a change; her body becomes tense and jerks spasmodically; her dark eyes roll wildly. Of her ability in her chosen field the medium says, "I advise on business an love affeahs. I tell good an bad nooz comin tuh yuh. Deah's a remedy fuh ebry trouble an I hab dat remedy, fuh a spirit hab brung it tuh me."[22a.]

791 794 783 Madam Truth, a member of the Holy Sanctified Church of Sandfly, said that all members must undergo a sanctifying process in order to be saved. After this has been accomplished members claim to be able to hear, from a great distance, singing, talking, and the sounding of drums. We [533] were told that the beating of the drums has a special significance, but that was all we could learn on the subject; we were told that this was a secret, divulged only to members.

794 262 Members of the church are forbidden to eat certain kinds of fish and also cabbage, lettuce, and other green vegetables. The reason they give is that they have received a warning from the spirits that it is unwise to eat these foods.[65]

791 533 202 The plump, dark-skinned fortune teller said that she had spent her childhood on Skidaway Island. She remembered hearing the drums beaten to tell the people in the nearby settlements of an approaching dance or festival. Her father had been one of those who beat the drum and thumped out a regular message on it, a message that could be heard for miles and was clearly understood by all those who had heard it.[26]

764 [782] The woman also remembered wakes which had been held on Skidaway. Coffee and sandwiches were served the mourners, each one of whom poured some of the coffee on the ground for the spirit of the deceased.[57b.] [58b.]

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759 759 suh, wid dat buzzud deah duh jedge jis couldn do nuttn. He jis had tuh pick up an go. Duh case wuz dismissed."

"Tell bout wut Smaht McCall done tuh Doctuh Rogers," 754 requested Uncle Jack.

759 "Well, Doctuh Rogers, he wuz a regluh doctuh an sometime duh folks would go tuh see um wen dey git sick stead ub goin tuh Smaht McCall. Smaht, he git mad. He say he fix dis Doctuh Rogers. He put a spell on duh hawse. Wen Doctuh Rogers go out nex time an git in he carriage, duh hawse run right intuh a tree an Doctuh Rogers git kill." [15]

759 As an afterthought he finished with, "Sometime deze root doctuhs is smahtuhn duh regluh doctuhs. Long time ago a doctuh tell me I hab tuh stop eatin meat. He say it ain good fuh me an ef uh eat it, I git sickn die. I bin eatin it ebuh sence an Ise still alibe. Dat doctuh bin dead fuh yeahs. Mos deze root doctuhs knows plenty; dey know nuff tuh lib."

•262 There were a number of palmetto trees in the section and we asked if any of the people had ever heard of eating palmetto cabbage.

"Yes'm," they answered.

"Palmettuh cabbages is good eatin."

"Yuh kin jis cut it up an eat it raw an yuh kin cook it up wid fat meat," Uncle Robert told us.

273 "Yuh kin make good palm wine outuh duh berries," volunteered Peter McQueen.[45]

538 Various members of the party asked Peter McQueen to tell one of the numerous stories about Brer Rabbit and Brer Wolf. Peter pondered for a minute; then he started:

539 "Bruh Rabbit and Bruh Wolf wuz alluz tryin tuh git duh bes uh one anudduh. Now Bruh Wolf he own a hoe an it wuk fuh crop all by itsef.[39] Bruh Wolf jis say, 'Swish,' tuh it. Den he sit down in duh fiel an duh hoe do all duh wuk.

"Bruh Rabbit he wahn dat hoe. He hide behine bush an watch how duh wolf make it wuk. One day wen duh wolf

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manner. The girl continued her work on the fish net, occasionally glancing at us with that impenetrable expression.

After much persuasion we gained the older woman's confidence and she spoke to us freely. She, too, attended the baptisms held by members of the two churches and also remembered various "settin-ups" she had gone to. She told us that food was usually prepared for the watchers.

"Bread an coffee," she said, "das wut dey gie yuh at a settin-up."

"We thought they ate chicken," we remarked.

"No, dey dohn hab no chicken. Jis bread an coffee."

The subject of food led us to inquire if she knew of any persons who refused to eat certain things.

"Muh huzbun wohn nebuh eat chicken. Ain nebuh eat it sence he wuz bawn, an needuh his mudduh befo him."[65]

"Why is that? Doesn't he like it?"

"Ain no mine wedduh he lak it aw ain lak it. He jis wohn eat it. Lots uh folks say deah's some food wut dey dohn eat. I nebuh eat rabbit. An none uh muh folks wouldn eat it needuh. Dey say it wuz no good tuh eat."

The conversation drifted on until the talk of food brought to the woman's mind gala occasions at which she had feasted and danced in her youth.

"We use tuh dance all duh time tuh duh drums," she said. "We would dance roun an roun in a succle an clap our hans an sing. Dey would hab duh dances obuh on St. Catherine Ilun."

"How would you know when they were going to hold a dance?"

"Dey beat duh drums on St. Catherine.[66] Den dey heah it at Harris Neck an folks deah tell all ub us yuh bout duh dance. We all go obuh tuh St. Catherine in a boat an dance an dance till mos daylight."

When the talk finally turned to roots and other potent

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115 early days, but her memory was rather clouded. She answered pleasantly, however, and when she was not talking to us mumbled softly to herself.

775 "I do know dat folks bawn wid a caul kin see spirits," [46]
787 she admitted. "Plenty uh folks roun yuh say duh spirits
845 peah tuh um." [59]

764 When we inquired about drums being beaten at funerals,
533 she shook her head stubbornly and refused to say anything on the subject.

The daughter, overhearing the conversation, paused in her task of ironing, and said, "Yes'm. Dasso. They beats the drum tuhday at the fewnul.[24] Specially ef yuh blongs tuh a awganization, they goes right along in the fewnul pruhcession an beats the drum as they mahch. I remembuh
[202] heahin bout in the ole days they beat out messages on the drum.[26] Let the folks know wen sumpm wuz bout tuh happen. Wen they give a dance ovuh on St. Catherine, they beat the drum tuh let the folks heah know bout it."

764 At a funeral, the bottles and dishes and other possessions belonging to the departed person were left on the grave, the women informed us. "The spirit need these," [47] the younger
[775] woman explained, "jis lak wen they's live. Evrybody mahch roun the grave in a succle an shout an pray."

• 262 We inquired if some people in the section were afraid to eat certain foods. Once more Josephine shook her head in negation.

The obliging daughter who listened intently to everything that was said again interceded. "I do heah bout that. Theah is some folks wut caahn eat suttn foods. They say it's bad luck an they nevuh do eat it. Right now theah's lots of foods wut some folks dohn eat." [55]

527 At this point in the conversation the older woman brightened and told us about the harvest festivals held during plantation days.

"We hab big feas. Ebrybody bring some ub duh fus

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764 dey put salt on duh stomach tuh keep it frum purgin. Ebrybody put duh hands on um tuh say good-bye.[31]

[533] "On duh way tuh duh grabe dey beat duh drum as dey is mahchin long.[34] Wen duh body is put in duh grabe, ebrybody shout roun duh grabe in a succle, singin an prayin. Each one trow a hanful uh dut in duh grabe." [35]

527 The conversation shifted to topics of a more cheerful nature and Rachel told us that in former years at harvest time, they had been in the habit of holding "crop suppuhs." [36]

Her face creased itself into a delightful grin and her eyes shone as she told us, "Dat sho wuz a big time. We hab a big feas. All night we shouts an in duh mawnin right at sunrise we pray an bow low tuh duh sun. Muh great-gran—she [782] name Peggy—I membuh she pray ebry day, at sunrise, at noon, an at sunset. She kneel down wen she pray an at duh en she bow low tree times, facin duh sun."

535 Alec's thoughts in the meantime had turned to more trivial affairs. He went on to tell us about the various dances that are popular at the present-day social affairs.

"Cose we do duh Buzzud Lope," [17] he began. "Ebrybody knows dat. Den we alluz does anudduh dance. We calls it 'Come Down tuh duh Myuh.' We dance roun an shake duh han an fiddle duh foot. One ub us kneel down in duh middle uh duh succle. Den we all call out an rise an shout roun, an we all fling duh foot agen."

795 In answer to our question about river baptisms the old people informed us that they are still held in the section.
796 Alec described these. "We all sing an pray an duh preachuh pray tuh duh Lord. Cose duh candidate caahn be save less he reely want tuh be. Duh preachuh an duh candidates goes [782] down in duh watuh. Den duh preachuh make a prayuh tuh [783] duh ribbuh an duh ribbuh washes duh sin away." [62]

• 262 It is bad luck to eat certain types of food, Rachel told us. 777 This belief had never influenced Rachel or Alec but they

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had known of people who were "fuhbid tuh eat eel fish mong udduh tings." [65]

Our visit was such a pleasant one that we stayed for a while longer to talk. The household was an unusually contented and peaceful one. The old couple were apparently satisfied with a simple scheme of existence although Alec did venture the usual remark regarding his old-age pension. "Sho would lak tuh hab it, missus. Mebbe yuh kin git dem gubment folks tuh see dat I gits it."

When we were about ready to leave, a middle-aged daughter, who had been lingering at the gateway, came up and joined the group. She confided that she had been married to one man for thirty years, but that he had died and she had recently remarried. This second marriage was evidently not so successful, for she said, "Dis huzbun ain lak duh fus one. He's triflin an ain sech a good providuh. Wen I loss duh fus huzbun, I sho loss ebryting."

At that time Rachel and Alec had been married for fifty-seven years and during all this period there had becn few differences or unpleasant happenings. As Alec escorted us to the car he told us of his high regard for his wife, assuring us in conclusion, "I ain nebuh had no trouble wid uh. Ain so much as tech uh wid a pocket hankuhchuh sence I done bin had uh."

A little later we went to visit Susan Maxwell,* who was sitting on the porch of her house when we drove up. She was about ninety-two years old and, having been ill recently, was snugly wrapped up in a variety of garments.

The house, she told us, was about one hundred years old. A hall ran from the front to the back part, and from the back porch a passage led to a lean-to kitchen. A barn near the house was about to collapse from age and lack of repair. In the yard a black ox lay chained under a tree and a large

* *Susan Maxwell, Possum Point.*

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during an ebb tide and Lawrence hastened to assure us, "Yes'm, dey alluz hole duh baptism on a high ebb tide. Das so duh tide will carry duh sin out." [63]

Had the old man ever known any people who had been named for the days of the week?

"I knowd one man name Fridy, one dat wuz name Satdy an anudduh he name wuz Toosdy. Guess dey name um dataway cuz dey wuz bawn on doze days." [20]

Baker told us that many people in the section refused to eat certain foods, believing bad luck would follow if they ate them.

"Deah's lots dataway now," he commented. "Lots uh folks dohn eat some food cuz ef dey did dey say it would bring bad luck on duh parents. Some dohn eat rice, some dohn eat egg, an some dohn eat chicken." [65]

"Muh gran, she Rachel Grant, she use tuh tell me bout lot uh deze tings. I membuh she use tuh pray ebry day at sunrise, at middle day and den at sunset. She alluz face duh sun an wen she finish prayin she alluz bow tuh duh sun. She tell me bout duh slabes wut could fly too. Ef dey didn lak it on duh plantation, dey jis take wing an fly right back tuh Africa.

"Muh gran say dey use tuh eat wid oystuh shells. Use um fuh spoons. Wen dey go tuh shoot duh gun, dey ketch duh fyuh wid a rag an flint."

We asked him if he had ever heard of a hoe that worked by itself and he told us that he had often heard this story regarding the hoe [39] and that he had also heard many tales about a magic rail splitting wood without anyone touching it.

Suddenly the quiet of the afternoon was shattered by a high reed-like whistling sound. It continued for quite a time, then stopped as abruptly as it had started. Was it a person or an animal? It was impossible for us to tell.

"Das a spiduh, missus," Baker explained. "It come roun

all gives praise fuh the good crop an then we shouts an sings all night.[38] An wen the sun rise, we stahts tuh dance. It ain so long since they stop that back in the woods but these young people they does new kines uh dances."

Horace interjected here, "I seen em do those dances back in the woods but not yuh."

We asked what sort of music they had for the dances.

"They mosly have guitah now," said Hettie, "an we use tuh use guitah too, but we makes em frum goad an we beats drums too. We makes em frum coon hide stretched ovuh hoops.[35] Muh step-fathuh, Andrew King, who lived down the Satilla Rivuh, use tuh tell me how it wuz in the ole days. He tell me they bring a boatload of them Africans ovuh frum a ilun tuh theah plantation. That wuz jis befo the waw an they wuz runnin frum the Yankees."

We asked if she had known any families who refused to eat certain kinds of food.

"Thas a hahd un, ma'am. Mos people eat wut they kin git but I knowd Chahlotte Froman who wouldn tech chicken. They all say that chicken wuz a duhty animal an they ain gonuh eat em.[65] They keeps chicken cuz frizzle chicken is a wise chicken. It sho kin fine wut you caahn fine."[13a]

We asked about conjure.

Horace laughed and said, "I tell yuh, ma'am, they's mo doin of cunjuh up roun Savannah than theah is in these pahts. I jis bin up theah an I ain nevuh heahd so much talk of it in muh life. Theah's a lot of ole customs still roun an we've all heahd bout em an knows bout em but theah ain nobody much wut's ole nuff tuh pay much tention tuh em." Horace smiled with the superiority of the younger generation.

Later we visited Henry Williams,* (Plate XIX)[A] whose little house (Plate XX)[B] sat back in a clump of tall, overgrown brush that grew close to the dilapidated paling fence.

* *Henry Williams, St. Marys.*

A, [See Category 142, plate following p. xxxii-AA--Analyst]
B, [See Category 342, plate following p. xxxii-BB--Analyst]

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829 He wuz the waw chief son and doze mahks tell whut tribe he
567 belong tuh. Wen I knowd im, he stay down in a lill house on the alley neah the ribbuh. I sho heahd im talk a lot. Ise hole duh hide fuh im wen he scrapes em with a scrapuh. Patty say all the people suppote the king by plantin cassaba an givin the king some uh the cassaba."

535 We asked Uncle Henry about the dances and the customs
527 of long ago.

567 "I sho see dances wut give thanks fuh the crop [38] an we prays in the night an dance wen the sun rise. I know the Buzzud Lope too.[17] I seen em do that an they use tuh have big Satdy night doins. Roun Christmas we git three days' holiday an theah's plenty uh dances an shoutin then. We goes tuh the ownuh an gits a ticket an we all gathuhs at the same place an we shouts an kick up with each othuh, but wen yuh ticket out, ef yuh dohn come back, the patrol will git yuh an then yuh gits whipped."

We asked him about witch doctors and taboos.

789 "I tell yuh, missus, they ain many wut knows bout roots
789 yuh tuhday. Some does come tuh sell hans an chahms [8] an they's a heap uh signs fuh the bad an good luck ef I have time tuh study bout em. Now the Jordan family, ole man
•262 Jordan, he dohn let none uh his family eat rabbit. Theah's the ole man an Ahnt Tillah an theah chillun, Sally an Austin. He use tuh tell the boy, 'Dohn yuh go shoot no rabbits roun yuh; we dohn none of us eats rabbit. Thas bad luck fuh us.' He sho wuz strick bout it." [65]

115 We questioned the old man further about his recollections of the beliefs and practices of his ancestors. It appeared, however, that for the present, his discourse had come to a close.

After a moment's hesitation he answered us with, "I ain think bout doze ole days so much lately, miss, but wen uh gits tuh studyin bout em, lots uh things comes back tuh me."

2: Jones-Jackson L-5 (1973-1986) 1987
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with slavery, the mention of cotton in Sea Island folklore and literature generally has negative connotations.

Today neither cotton nor rice is grown to any extent on or around the Sea Islands. Rice was gradually eliminated by the many disastrous floods and storms which frequent the Carolina coast. Cotton was abandoned in favor of more lucrative means of support, especially since the cotton-picking machine eliminated the need for harvesting of cotton by hand. The primary crops now are edible produce, including soybeans, peas, okra, tomatoes, corn, peanuts, and watermelons, and many folk narratives focus on the planting, cultivation, and harvesting of these crops.

Another major food source is fish, shrimp, crabs, oysters, mussels, clams, lobsters, conchs, and sharks, all of which the islanders prepare expertly and variously. Fish has always been important in the local diet. Consider, for example, a resident minister's account of the varieties available around Edisto Island in 1800:

> The creeks, rivers, and seas which indent and surround the island furnish at different and appropriate seasons of the year, a great variety of excellent fish—as the larger drum, the small black drum, bass, rock-fish, sheephead, cavallie, bonnetta, salmon-trout, yellowtail, ale-wife, croaker, plaice, flounder, skate, pike, shad, and catfish, and many others, suitable for the table. Porpoise and sharks frequent the creeks and surrounding waters. Some of the latter are seen and caught of an enormous size. They are considered as just objects of terror by the negroes. And yet, although the fishermen continue hours together waist deep in water, and have often the misfortune of hooking them, they escape with impunity.[30]

Crabbing and fishing are so much a part of Sea Island culture that many children learn the fine art of casting and netting as early as three years old. Some residents who earn their livings from fishing practice an old African method of netting fish in mass. An elderly gentleman explained to me that his grandfather had taught him to beat on the sides of his boat to attract fish and porpoises to the area (see Appendix 1).[A] The porpoises scare schools of fish ahead of them, and the fish are then caught in the nets. In a variant of this method, a group of fishermen will wade out into the water to beat on their drums or other instruments. The more noise they create above and below water, the more

A. [For Appendix 1, see Category 226, pp. 151-155--Analyst]

2: Jones-Jackson L-5 (1973-1986) 1987
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fish they attract to the area. One has to be careful in this venture, however, because the drums may also bring sharks.[31]

Though much sustenance is taken from the rivers, the streams, and the ocean, another food source is provided by creatures that live at the edge of the water, such as "cooters" (slider turtles), bullfrogs, terrapins, alligators, and sometimes rattlesnakes (not everyone will eat the latter because the flesh is believed to be poisonous if the snake was angered before it was killed). The flesh from the cooter is particularly pleasing to some islanders owing to its unusual taste and tender texture. The alligator is a rare delicacy, now, being no longer as readily available as it was in the past. Yet Ber Gator[32] and his swampy home continue to be lively topics in folklore and literature. Under the slave regime, according to one source, when the islanders were denied the use of guns and powder, they hunted the alligator armed only with a long hook. They entered his hole at low tide and, at considerable risk to their lives and legs, dragged the alligator out and killed him quickly. The skin was saved to sell and the flesh taken home for cooking.[33]

This dangerous method of hunting alligators is reminiscent of an even more dangerous method once used to trap the giant boa constrictors and pythons in Nigeria. One Igbo hunter explained to me that the snake hunters rubbed their bodies with a scent taken from captured boa constrictors and pythons before entering places which they were known to inhabit, in order to prevent the snake from smelling their approach. Once the quarry's hole had been located, either the hunters dragged him out with a hook or, at greater risk, one man would insert a leg into the snake's hole, allowing the snake to swallow it up to the hip. When the leg was pulled out the snake came along helplessly, unable to move with the hunter's leg in his mouth. The hunter quickly drew his knife, slit the snake's jaws and throat, and thus recovered his leg. The account of this method of hunting was corroborated by some Nigerians and called a lie by others. The hunter who told me about it, however, swore that it was indeed done. Like the alligators in the United States, the giant snakes are captured in Nigeria chiefly for their hides. The larger the snake, the more dangerous his capture is, and thus the greater the price paid for his skin will be.

The woods provide a further excellent supply of food for the Sea Islanders. Many of the more remote islands still abound with large ducks, partridges, wild turkeys, geese, and many other edible birds. Likewise, the woodlands are alive with game. Deer often roam alongside the roads in the early morning.

2: Jones-Jackson L-5 (1973-1986) 1987
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She is fifty or more years of age, gets around well, is the oldest member of her household, and is primarily responsible for the total care of more than ten children, ranging in ages from two to sixteen years of age. Some of them are her own children; others are her grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Six of them live with her, and four are left in her care during the day while their parents are away working. I had the pleasure of spending more than two weeks residing with Miss Deeley and her large family. I shared a large room with three of the girls and came to appreciate the effort that went into keeping that room clean and orderly at all times. No one was allowed to retire for the evening without a bath regardless of circumstances. Most of the time, a fire was built around a large black pot in the early evening to heat the water for baths before supper was served. All the children were lined up and given baths in a number-three washtub, given their nightclothes, and served supper around a large handmade wooden table. Miss Deeley had not accepted electricity for her home, so a kerosene lamp was the primary source of light after nightfall. Mealtime was always a pleasure at this home. The last meal of the day often consisted of cowpeas and rice cooked and seasoned with "bone," or rice served with shrimp and other fish caught by the children during the day. There was always hot corn bread and molasses and a bucket of iced tea.

After meals were served, the children gathered around the open fireplace, and Miss Deeley entertained all of us for hours until the fire died down and the sleeping children had to be carried to their beds. This woman was an avid storyteller. Her general procedure was first to get everyone settled. Then she herself could get comfortable in the place always reserved for her by the window. After poking around in the fire until she was satisfied that it was burning well, she would lean back in her chair, take a couple of good bites of tobacco, kept in her apron pocket, and then lift up the youngest child into her lap and begin to reminisce about happenings during the day. She had the ability to tell a range of stories, but she seemed particularly adept at hag, ghost, or other psychological thrillers. She traveled around much in her day as a migrant worker in Arizona and Colorado; she said she heard some of her stories around the campfires there. Others she had learned from her parents and grandparents, and still others she said she had just made up to keep the children entertained.

Miss Deeley was fairly strict with the children. Once she permitted two of the oldest to go to the island store for some "sweet"; she spat

2: Jones-Jackson L-5 (1973-1986) 1987
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115 God, roots, and life. He was respected in the community and renowned for his knowledge of the Bible and root medicine. He owned a fair amount of land, which he put to good use growing corn, cucumbers, peas, okra, tomatoes, and other vegetables. The only time I ever got to talk with him was late evenings (when the sun "de red for down"), when he would come in from plowing and planting and sit under his big pecan tree to "catch some breeze." On a few occasions his wife, Miss Maime, a small, short-legged, soft-spoken woman, brought his plate out to the pecan tree so that he could eat while he talked to me. His plate had always been set aside and kept warm, and it was indeed tempting, piled high with cowpeas and bone, a good helping of corn bread sliced and filled with fresh butter and molasses, onions and tomatoes from the garden, and hot pepper sauce, with penny drink or iced tea served in his own particular glass.

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Mr. Hampy was not a lonely man. He had several children and more head of grandchildren than he felt he could keep up with. Mr. Hampy's children who had remained at home had built their houses or set up their trailers so that each shared the communal yard area near his home, as is traditional in Sea Island family communities. Some of his children, including a special daughter, had moved to New York. The daughter was special because she had been born with a caul over her face and was thus thought to have the gift not only to see ghosts, hants, or hags but to be able to know things that other people are not privileged to know. Mr. Hampy himself had been born with a caul, and he was thus able to sympathize with her special sight. In fact, he attributed her leaving the island and going to New York in part to her desire for an area where such things as ghosts, hags, and plat-eyes were less prevalent. Because the island roads are densely forested, they are judged natural haunts for the spirits of the dead. Mr. Hampy often amused himself by telling me that if I really wanted to see a ghost, he could show me one any day of the week just after midnight on the road leading to the Presbyterian graveyard. However, we never made that journey after nightfall to see the ghost standing at the entrance to the lane (see Appendix 3).[A]

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Mr. Hampy told no tales of Ber Rabbit and his witty ways, though he admitted that he knew many of them. His only topics were religious or medicinal. It was from him that I learned many of the Sea Island folk cures. He accompanied me to the wooded area behind his home and pointed out some of the common roots that grow on top of the

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A. [For Appendix 3, see Category 775, pp. 158-164--Analyst]

2: Jones-Jackson L-5 (1973-1986) 1987
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rham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1940), pp. 321–22. The original source for this order is the *Report of the Commissioner of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands*, 39th Cong., 1st sess., 1865–66, Exec. Doc. 11, p. 10.

23. Guion Johnson, *A Social History of the Sea Islands with Special References to St. Helena Island, South Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1930), p. 18.

24. Though many writers have stated that rice was a Sea Island crop (see, for example, Wood, *Black Majority;* and Jackson, Slaughter, and Blake, "The Sea Islands as a Cultural Resource"), Professor Charles Joyner has indicated to me (through personal communication) that rice was grown not on the Sea Islands but in rice fields adjoining nearby mainland rivers. Rice requires fresh water, and the flooding and draining of rice fields require freshwater rivers moved by ocean tides. Thus Sandy Island had rice fields but the ocean islands did not.

25. Wood, *Black Majority*, p. 59.

26. Ibid., p. 59.

27. Ruth Finnegan, *Limba Stories and Storytelling* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969).

28. Rice is normally eaten for breakfast, lunch, and dinner in variation with different meats, gumbos, greens, and sauces, many of which are still prepared and eaten on the islands in traditional fashions. Two carry-overs, for example, are a kind of okra soup called *ofey okra* in Igbo and a turnip green dish prepared with bits of meat, onion, hot peppers, and pepper sauce that has its counterpart in Yoruba, Igbo, and Ibebio cultures. In Africa these vegetable and meat dishes are eaten with *fufu* or *gari*, a soft substance about the consistency of bread dough. On the islands, instead of fufu and gari, corn bread is served with the greens or okra soup; small bits are pinched off, mashed together with the fingers, and then dipped and rolled in the vegetable sauce.

29. Guion Johnson, *History of the Sea Islands*, p. 26.

30. Quoted in Crum, *Gullah*, p. 70.

31. This practice was also observed by Jackson, Slaughter, and Blake; see "The Sea Islands as a Cultural Resource."

32. *Ber* is the Sea Island form of the word *Brer*.

33. Crum, *Gullah*, p. 55.

34. Quoted in ibid., p. 60.

35. This observation may in part answer a question posed by Richard Dorson, an avid researcher and collector of black folktales. Dorson observes that southern blacks drew a fair portion of their folktale material from the barnyards, fields, and woods which formed their environment. "Why they neglected such familiar denizens as the coon and the possum," he comments, "in favor of the rabbit and the fox, and preferred the buzzard over the owl, remain teasing questions" (*American Negro Folktales* [New York: Fawcett, 1967], p. 67). Perhaps the questions are not "teasing" at all. The animals of the tales are intensely interesting to the islanders because they have had to study these animals so closely to learn to hunt them. According to some of the island storytellers—people who are also known for their hunting skills—such animals as the buzzard are revered for their patience. They are often used as foils to much smarter animals like the monkey or the rabbit. On the other hand, the rabbit is renowned for his cunning and his illusionary and evasive skills. Though his teeth are sharp, he has no

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Rev. G. C. Brown

THOSE WERE ROUGH DAYS

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My wife and I've been here since '36. No pastor had lived here the last forty years before we came. And of course by not living with the people, they couldn't know their need and their desire. They wanted somebody to come and live with the people—that's why we came.

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The first thing I found here was extreme poverty. That was during the days of the Depression, and there was no work except the WPA project. That white schoolhouse out there was built as a WPA project. The men on the farms were working for seven cents an hour. Oh yeah, seven cents. And the women, five cents.

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The men plowed; the women did all the farm work. That time they didn't have planters to plant the potatoes. They cut the potatoes, dropped them in the field, and the men did all the work with the plows. That give pretty good farm employment. You had a number of men running plows, the women go along and drop the potatoes, and that give them a good day's work—several days' work in springtime. That give them employment during the planting season.

And the cabbage plant out by hand. Nowadays some have a planter. Some children worked then, but they didn't have too many children that time. There hadn't been so much marrying and going on.

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Those were rough days. Food was short, scarce, didn't have much. The most they ate those days, they ate rice, grits and canned tomatoes. They bought their tomatoes at the store. They were cheap then. They bought the grits. Some made their own grits. They had a few mill. And they used to raise their own rice. There were a lot of rice farms around. They had a way of cleaning it and milling it.

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Most of 'em were poor. Had no income. Very little income. They lived out of the creek. In the summertime they had crabs and shrimp, and in the wintertime had oysters. You could buy right at your door about three times a week, undressed shrimp—five cents a plate. In the wintertime we buy

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Mr. Joe Deas

WE BEEN CLIMBING ON THE ROUGH SIDE OF THE MOUNTAIN

159 735 From the time I have sense enough to recollect in this world, we have trouble and crosses, ups and downs. We been climbing on the rough side of the mountain--climbing up, falling back, grabbin' bottom.

Way back yonder, in 1893, we had to work for something to eat. Work on the white folks' farm, move from place to place, eat with stick for spoon. Got oshter, fish, crab and 'tato. Get corn meal, carry 'em to the mill and (262) grind 'em and eat corn meal. Sweet potato. All that just to bring us this far. And I say thank God that I live to see light come into the world. Wise man from all part of the world come into *this* world. The world is lifting up more and more.

(501) My old parents didn't see these things--automobile, airplane. We come from rowboat time. Had to row from home to town and back. Sometime I have to stay a whole day; have to wait on the tide, all that to row. And God spare us live to see this day.

(492) (493) We used to drive with ox and cart, haul wood with old oxen, plow with oxen. All that. Today no oxen. Nothing but car and truck and bus and trailer and all kind of thing like that.

159 735 178 262 Old days you couldn't eat nothing but 'tato and peas and corn and corn flour and crab and all like them. Well these days it's Christmas every day. Anything you want now you get 'em. In them days back, if one somebody kill a hog in the community, you think it was Christmas by the hog only. But now, eat hog meat any day you want. Go from store to store to get the thing you want. It's Christmas every day now for we. Light come into the world. Them times we had to buy, and money was so little, you can't see your way to buy what you need for live. Had to make out 'til we leave the white folks' place and then start to come up.

735 178 It's a blessing we see the day. Everybody lifting up. God put a way to your brains to catch on to these things, that you may have bread to carry you 'til He ready for you. The world is comin' up and is wise and wise and wise, until we *all* can get some bread from God. Man ain't able to give 'em, God put 'em into that man that he can share around to the next brother.

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Mrs. Janie Hunter

ASH CAKE IS SOMETHING YOU BAKE IN THE CHIMBLEY

735 252

Way back yonder the old lady and them had some hard times. Had to take water out the creek to cook with. They'd cook ash cake. Ash cake is something you bake in the chimbley—in the fire hearth. You have the fire hot and burn down to ashes. You mix the corn meal and you open the ashes and place the corn meal in the ashes. You haul the coals on it, and it come to a brown. After you take 'em off the hearth, you wash 'em in something call dishpan and you put it on the table and let it cold. Cut it open with the knife, and you call that ash cake.

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In the old time you couldn't afford to buy coffee or tea. We'd take the corn off the cob, break the corn off the stalk and put it in the chimbley hearth and let it burn. You have a pot of water on the fire, and when the corn burn you drop it in the pot and that turn coffee. You drink that along with ash cake. For tea, you take grits and put a frying pan on the fire, let the grits parch 'til brown. Then you pour water in the pan and that turn tea. Call 'em grits tea.

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Yeah boy, we come through a great tribulation. But there's freedom now. You can get anything you want if you got the money.

Mr. Willie Hunter

WE SEE MEAT, BUT WE DON'T GET IT

735 159 262 (241)

My aunty raised me from a little baby, 'cause I ain't know my mother, neither father. He raise me up on his farm, was plant cotton, and peas, potatoes, and all. For dinner we eat peas and some corn grits, little sweet potato, and drink some water. And after that we go back in the field, pick some more cotton, dig some more 'tato. We see meat, but we don't get it. They had little meat in the soup, you know, boil with the peas or turnip, and cook with some meat in it, but you don't get none for we children, 'cause wouldn't have that much meat for give we, understand?

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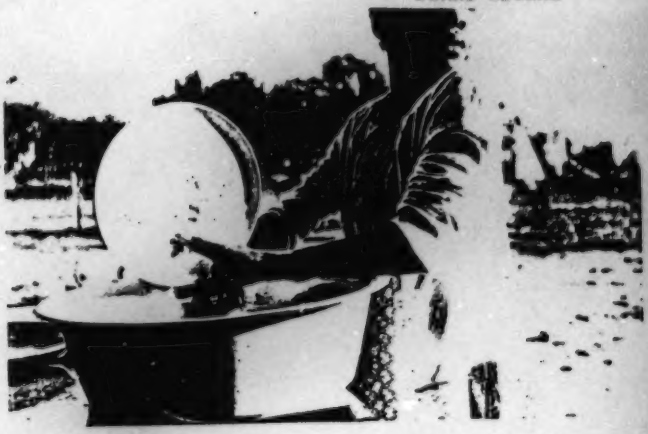

Miss Yvonne Hunter

ALL US WORKS

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I am in third grade. I got left down one year because my mother was in New York one spring and I didn't have no shoes. I take arithmetic, language and reading. I like arithmetic best. When I grow up, if I don't be a secretary, I want to be a nurse.

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For lunch at school we have popcorn, links, milk, roll, and have soup sometime. We have to pay for it. Sometime we take sandwich. At home we have grits, sometime rice for breakfast. Put milk and butter on rice. And have bread. Supper we have chicken and rice. Have greens, sometime cornbread and soup—vegetable soup. When Itchy and Joe go in the creek, we have oshters, crab, clams, fish.

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Mother want us in bed at six o'clock. Sometime we go to bed seven-thirty. Six sleep in a room. Tina and me sleep together, and Patricia and her two children sleep together, Mama and Papa sleep together, and Itchy sleep on the chair, and David and Johnny sleep on the couch.

We get up six o'clock. The bus come by at seven. School start at eight-thirty. It takes five minute to get to school in the bus. I wash dishes before I go to school.

All us works. Sometime I wash dishes and I sweep the floor and I mop the floor. I cook. I cook grits, rice, cornbread. I cook meat, fry chicken, and I can make macaroni, and I can make salad.

I don't know if I want to get married. I don't like boys.

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
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SLAVE RATIONS

The amount and type of rations which were issued to the hands varied with the plantation. For instance, four different plantations on Edisto Island observed the following practices.[26] One plantation master issued to each hand one bushel of potatoes a week from about October 1 to February 1, and then one peck of corn, ground or unground as preferred, or one peck of broken rice. The owner gave out meat occasionally. On another plantation the rations were: one bushel of potatoes, or ten quarts of corn meal, or eight quarts of rice and four quarts of peas. In addition to this, the slaves, numbering 170, were allowed during the year twenty barrels of salt fish, two barrels of molasses, and fresh meat occasionally. On a third plantation the diet was varied by a weekly ration of a half bushel of potatoes, six quarts of meal, and twenty-one pounds of fresh meat, or ten quarts of meal or rice. A fourth plantation gave out, in addition to the usual half bushel of potatoes, a quart of vegetable soup once a day during hard labor and twice a week at all other times.

In 1862 Edward L. Pierce reported that the customary rations issued by St. Helena planters were a peck of corn a week to each hand and meat at Christmas and in June when work was hardest.[27] While a few plantations allowed meat only at Christmas, a few others dealt it out as often as once a month or once a fortnight. Some plantations also gave molasses and sugar occasionally. Children were allowed from two to six quarts of corn a week, the amount varying with the age of the child. Edward S. Philbrick, one of the Government's superintendents of

[26] Turner, *Cotton Planter's Manual*, p. 134.
[27] Pierce, "Report," in *Rebellion Record*, sup., I, 310.

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
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plantations in 1862, reported that Thomas A. Coffin gave his 250 slaves twelve beeves in summer and four at Christmas, four barrels of molasses in summer, and from April to June, when work was heavy, two pecks of corn and two and a half pounds of bacon per slave.[28] He also regularly gave every hand a quart of salt a month and every man two "hands" of tobacco a month and four "hands" at Christmas.

In addition to the rations issued by the master, the slave might gather from the plantation creeks and rivers all the oysters and crabs which he desired. The practice in regard to the fish varied with the plantations, as will be indicated later.[29] Each family was also given a small patch of ground, about one task, back of the cabin to cultivate as desired. Most families planted three or four rows of corn and put the rest in potatoes. They ate part of the corn, but fed most of it to the pig and chickens which each hand was permitted to keep. Some planters on St. Helena even permitted their Negroes to have cattle. Nor did the hands usually eat their stock and poultry, but sold it to the master or to the island storekeeper or to merchants in Beaufort.

When Captain Basil Hall visited a plantation on St. Simon's Island in 1828, he found that the master's family was supplied entirely with poultry and eggs by his Negroes at these prices: eggs, 12½ cents a dozen; chickens, 12½ cents each; fowls, 20 to 25 cents each; ducks, 50 cents each.[30] They were given the liberty to carry their produce to a better market if they could find one. With

[28] MS in Port Royal Correspondence. In Archives of U. S. Treasury Department.
[29] *Infra*, p. 142.
[30] Hall, *Travels in North America*, II, 232.

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
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huge logs hollowed at one end. At these, two stood with their rude pestles striking alternately up and down. After the corn was shelled, the driver poured all upon a large hide or blanket and measured each person's portion into a basket, made by hand from pine straw and palmetto. After receiving the corn, the women ground it into grits, each waiting her turn at one of the hand-mills near the cornhouse.

With the aid of her children, the mother prepared supper from the rations just issued, supplementing the corn and salt pork with "turnip salad" or cow-peas from the "patch" back of the cabin, sweet potatoes roasted in the ashes, oysters or crabs from the creek, or with luxuries which she had bought at one of the island stores. Into the black pot placed on a bed of coals on the hearth went the grits to be boiled until thick and tender, or, perhaps, vegetables and fat pork might be cooking there. If so, the corn meal, which had come out of the mill together with the grits, would be made into a pone, cooked either on the open hearth or, if the family were thrifty, in a frying pan over the coals. The elders first helped themselves from the pot, and then turned it over to the children who ate to their satisfaction, and finally relinquished it to the dogs, invariably a part of the slave family, who licked it clean for the next meal.[25]

The mother also prepared the hasty breakfast eaten just after the conch blew at "day clean," if, indeed, the workers took time for breakfast, and filled her own and

[25] See Laura M. Towne, "Pioneer Work on the Sea Islands," *Southern Workman*, July, 1901.

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wrote, "but domestic freedom—the right just found, to have their own way in their families and rule their wives—that is an inestimable privilege! In slavery the woman was far more important, and was in every way held higher than the man. Several speakers have been here who have advised the people to set the women in their proper place—never to tell them anything of their concerns, etc., etc.; and the notion of being bigger than women generally, is just now inflating the conceit of the males to an amazing degree. When women get the vote, too, no people will be more indignant than these, I suppose."[27]

The care of the children was divided between the mother and the plantation nurse, with the other children also doing their share of "minding child." When Captain Basil Hall visited a plantation near Charleston on his tour of the South in 1828 he found the mothers in the field at their work and "a sober old matron in charge of the three dozen shining urchins, collected together in a house near the center of the village. Over the fire hung a large pot of hominy, a preparation of Indian corn, making ready for the little folks' supper, and a very merry, happy-looking party they seemed."[28] At all other times, the children were in the mother's care. It was not an uncommon sight to see a woman going about her home work with an infant tied securely to her back.

Parents were severe in the discipline of their children, for they did not want their offspring to grow up to be "no-manners." They taught them to curtesy when approached by a white person and to hold out their hands to

[27] *Letters and Diary of Laura M. Towne*, p. 184.
[28] Hall, *Travels in North America*, II, 210; *supra*, pp. 97-98.